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"WHEN WILL I BE BLOWN UP?" – WILLIAM FAULKNER'S WRITING WARFARE

ANCA PEIU[1]

ABSTRACT. "***When Will I Be Blown Up?" – William Faulkner's Writing Warfare*.** The American Civil War (1861-1865) is not William Faulkner's only warfare. The American modern writer remained faithful to his romantic creed that the poet's mission is to render the innermost human (self)contradictions. Faulkner's own writing style evinces this endless state of warfare at the back of his mind. It is like him to make us readers doubt our own peace delusions; yet it is like him also to doubt the solemn rhetoric of any "serious" historical warfare. The purpose of my essay is to prove that William Faulkner's fiction evoking historical warfare can still help us readers out of our mortal fear. By means of his writing art, championing a sound sense of humor as the only hope for spiritual survival, Faulkner's message is universal and still valid.

Keywords: *mock-heroic, anti-hero, parody, irony, visionary poetic imagination, history as fact and/or fiction, warfare trauma and/or memory.*

REZUMAT. "***Când voi fi aruncat în aer?" – Războiul scrierilor lui William Faulkner***. Războiul Civil american (1861-1865) nu este nicidecum singurul război al lui William Faulkner. Scriitorul modern american a rămas credincios convingerii că misiunea poetului este de a reda cele mai adânci contradicții din sufletul omenesc. Însuși stilul literar al lui Faulkner stă mărturie acestei continue stări de asediu din profunzimea minții scriitorului. Este caracteristic pentru el să-și pună cititorii pe gânduri în legătură cu amăgitoarea lor stare de pace; și totuși, la fel de caracteristic pentru el este să pună sub semnul întrebării retorica solemnă a oricărui război istoric „serios." Scopul eseului meu este de a demonstra că proza literară a lui William Faulkner, evocând diverse momente din războaiele istorice, ne poate încă ajuta pe noi, cititorii lui de azi, să ne învingem teama de moarte. Prin arta sa narativă, arborând un înviorător simţ al umorului ca singura speranță de supraviețuire spirituală, mesajul lui Faulkner rămâne universal și valabil.

Cuvinte-cheie*: pseudo-eroism, anti-erou, parodie, ironie, imaginație poetică vizionară, istoria ca fapt și/sau ficțiune, trauma și/sau memoria războiului.*

[1] Dr. Anca Peiu is Associate Professor at the English Department of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest, Romania. She has specialized in American Literature, but also taught: early American Civilization, modern and postmodern British Literature. Her most recent book is *Five Versions of Selfhood in 19th Century American Literature*, published by C. H. Beck Publishing House in 2013. Contact address: <ancapeiu@gmail.com>.

> *Motto:* "Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat."
> (William Faulkner's *Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature*[2])

The paragraph quoted in the motto above has many key-words and key-phrases, which in the long run have come to represent William Faulkner's *ars poetica*: "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" is perhaps the best known of them all remembered here. Yet, what strikes me now is Faulkner's *today*: it reads too much like our today, sixty-six years after this solemn speech was uttered. It is his visionary (sense of) *today* which fits into our puzzle now just as well as it used to fit into his puzzle formerly. What was then "the general and universal fear" of the Cold War that had even acquired a feeling of routine has now turned into our everyday living with global terrorism – indeed, "so long sustained that we can even bear it." And thus we seem to share the question "When will I be blown up?" with those mid-twentieth century generations so painfully aware of a relative survival that should never be taken for granted.

The culture of war is essentially embedded into Faulkner's mind as a writer and as a man of his time. There is hardly anything else that he seems to write about – except, perhaps, love. Yet what Faulkner, the artist, fights in this celebrated confession is his younger colleagues yielding to defeat, their surrender to the all too human panic when outward "real" warfare appears as the only literary topic left. This is what makes out of Faulkner's aesthetic plea for "the human heart at conflict with itself" a genuine heroic plea in times of deadly danger.

Therefore, we get in this kaleidoscopic view a threefold vision of warfare: the war outside – i.e. the Cold War threatening most survivors of the Second World War; the war inside the Old South myth – i.e. the American Civil War of 1861 – 1865, haunting the map of Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi and also the mind of its "sole owner and proprietor;" last but not least: "the human heart in conflict with itself" – perhaps the most unflinching kind of warfare. William Faulkner's writing warfare, though perhaps devoid of any hope, still desperately clings to the skeptical lesson of his elders, in fact and/or fiction: "[b]ecause no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (*The Sound and the Fury*, "June Second, 1910," 48). William Faulkner gave heroism not a chance but the poet's mission.

[2] Malcolm Cowley, 723.

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"When will I be blown up?" asks for the same kind of (rhetorically warning) answer as the prophecy: "The past is never dead: it's not even past" (*Requiem for a Nun*, 80). War is never over. And no heroic deeds of honor and valor can compensate in fiction for its horror and clumsy grotesque in fact.

Like no other writer in world literature, William Faulkner can give us a sense of immanence/ imminence of a war neither heroic, nor justified by any kind of logic. The paradox of warfare in Faulkner's diegesis borrows something from the paradox of time – or rather from the way both are rendered there, in Yoknapatawpha. Faulkner dismantles our notion of time and turns it into a surprise. Yet, nostalgia for the past – enhanced by a common sort of conventional fiction – is the most ordinary attitude in storytelling. The Faulknerian shock occurs precisely when the past is recaptured as some raw (diegetic) material – no nostalgia included. No conventional enhancement either. The past is as awkward and ineffable as the present: war is here and now. And may we paraphrase: (Faulkner's) war is never dead; it's not even war.

Faulkner can make us see that political/historical warfare has never been about what it pretended to be: this is where its perversity lies. The Union victory in American Civil War was to ensure above all that there be no secession; the Confederacy institution of slavery was just one aspect of the political rivalry between the highly industrialized North and the agrarian Old South. War proves and solves hardly anything – hence it is utterly pointless. Although African American chattel slavery was abolished, interracial tensions have survived, despite emancipation and Civil Rights movements. And last but not least, war defies reason and logic – hence it is preposterous. Yet it will be carried out in virtue of arguments claiming immunity to both reason and logic.

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In this essay we will resort to a few aspects of two canonical Faulknerian novels: *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *Light in August* (1932) – plus a couple of funny tales which would later become the collection *The Unvanquished* (1938) and which are now part of the *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (1979). In all these illustrative fragments war appears to be preposterous, pointless and perverse.

And no touch of gilded kitsch heroism added, war is but one of the daily challenges of precarious human survival. With a precursor like Stephen Crane[3], William Faulkner can employ warfare as an allegory of everyday life in times of peace. Not even then is the human heart spared its conflicts with itself.

[3] See Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War* (1895), a novella about the ambiguities between courage and cowardice on any allegorical battlefield. Its fine sarcasm and bold satire have earned this little book a safe top rank in the classic American literary canon. Stephen Crane's vision upon the Civil War stems from the very opposite viewpoint, since Henry

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Romanian readers and moviegoers have always regarded Old South stories with affection and sympathy – primarily under the impact of Margaret Mitchell's best-selling novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and the Hollywood cult movie (1939) drawn after it, with all-time stars Vivian Leigh, Clark Gable, and Leslie Howard cast in the roles of Scarlett O'Hara – the resilient Old South *belle*; Rhett Butler – the cynical ungentlemanly Old South survivor; and Ashley Wilkes – the weak White aristocratic Southerner defeated by the fratricide war.

And yet, although not nearly as numerous, there have always been enough fans among us for a most unusual Old South book, published in 1936 – the same year as *Gone with the Wind* - and defying all categories and trends, almost impossible to classify theoretically and critically: William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

It is the book with the first version of William Faulkner's map of Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. The map mentions its absolute master: "William Faulkner, Sole Owner & Proprietor". The map is preceded by the impossible Chronology and Genealogy adding up to this enigmatic multilayered narrative and deepening its meaning and mystery.

The map's legend also provides some census data: "Area, 2400 square miles. Population: Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 409). This apparent accuracy is highly ironic, of course: not only does it imply that – as long as there is no mention of the (historical or at least fictional) moment – the figures can have hardly any relevance; but it also makes the reader consider the element of surprise in (real or fictive) life: the fact that the two population segments must have bred a third one by miscegenation – thus escaping the chartable realm of abstract figures.

In our country this strange book got first published in 1974. It was translated into Romanian by Mircea Ivănescu, a poet and also one of the acknowledged masters in the trade of high literature translation. This is how I met William Faulkner. I was in my teens, indeed a precocious reader.

Five years before that, in 1969, the Romanian Writers' Union had awarded its annual prize to Sorin Alexandrescu's thorough monographic study *William Faulkner*, one of the best Romanian books of literary criticism and history focusing on a major writer of the twentieth century canon. This

Fleming, its protagonist, is a young soldier of the Union troops, fighting against the Confederate rebels – what matters in Crane's masterpiece rather concerns and confirms William Faulkner's vision of "the human heart at conflict with itself." It is to himself that Crane's Youth must prove to be a hero. And he fails. But his fellow-troopers hardly ever realize that. And so he ends up with "the red badge of courage." Stephen Crane himself had never been on a battlefield, yet his virtuoso strategies of verisimilitude in *The Red Badge of Courage* have remained exemplary for warfare narrative art. Likewise, William Faulkner missed his own chance to military heroism in World War I; yet his gift for empathy has rendered his warfare imagery flawless.

exceptional work has remained a must for any Romanian student of Faulkner's entire artistic achievement.

Three years ago, in 2013, I received a fine gift that honors me. It confirmed my belonging to this unofficial exquisite club of Romanian addicted admirers of William Faulkner: the outstanding essay volume *Ce rămâne: William Faulkner şi misterele ţinutului Yoknapatawpha*[4] by Mircea Mihăieş. The author is more than a scholar: a writer himself and – as a university professor – a true Romanian authority in contemporary Faulkner studies. His book was awarded the Romanian Writers' Union prize for 2012.

Thus, beyond all sophisticated American and international Faulknerian exegesis, from Cleanth Brooks to Jay Parini and/or Richard Gray, beyond all the complex cultural studies analyzing his work and his life – I daresay that there is also a Romanian cultural destiny for William Faulkner. His universality and especially his enduring presence in our minds over here cannot be questioned: they can only prove that his vision of the American Old South is, by no means, provincial.

William Faulkner's novels and short stories have appealed and will always appeal to those Romanian readers who are aware of the fact that family (and national) stories require the book plus the map, plus the chronology, plus the genealogy. And the meaning within it all will still stay a mystery.

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In his book, Mircea Mihăieş follows an a-chronological pattern and employs chapter and subchapter titles prompted rather by the writer himself than by the professor. For instance, Chapter "III: Ce rămâne? Blestemul şi periferia"[5] includes a subchapter called "1938: Războaiele necivile"[6]. This segment mainly concerns Faulkner's book *The Unvanquished*, but it also keeps up pace with the ghostly loomings of Thomas Sutpen, even after the story plus the chronology, plus the genealogy, plus the map of *Absalom, Absalom!* were supposed to be over and done with.

What I should like to borrow here from Mircea Mihăieş (if I may) is this particular coinage – the "*Uncivil Wars*." What he means by this in his own approach – so much more than an academic study – is that the American Civil War was carried out on battlefields both visible and invisible; moreover, that it engaged not only men officially fighting as soldiers and officers, but (their) women also, fighting as unofficial rebels. Children– both black and white – were part of the war, too. Often they were orphaned by parents but still relying on some Granny, who could do the odd job of survival for the entire family. Because this family consists of them all, it takes them all: dead or alive, white or black,

[4] Mircea Mihăieş, *What Will Endure: William Faulkner and the Mysteries of Yoknapatawpha County* – in Romanian in the original (author's translation).

[5] "III. What Will Endure? Doom and Periphery" – in Romanian in the original (author's translation).

[6] "1938: The Uncivil Wars" – in Romanian in the original (author's translation).

young or old. They are all wanted in the enduring spirit of the doomed land. And they speak the same language: the drawling English of the defeated; the prim English of the winners; the globalizing English of the readers of their stories – who can (understand and) translate it both ways.

Miss Rosa Millard is the maternal grandmother of Bayard Sartoris. Her daughter has died. Her son in law, John Sartoris, is a Confederate officer. She is the only one adult left in the family mansion, to take care of two boys of the same age: young Bayard, her own grandson, and Ringo, the son of a black slave. *The Unvanquished* tales are told from Bayard's point of view. Miss Rosa Millard has to betray her moral principles and face the challenges of her hallucinating condition. For the two boys' sake, she gets involved into some improbable trade with mules, selling the animals twice and thrice to the Yankees. Yet her unorthodox profit is for a good cause: she gives the money to the community she belongs to, i.e. to the family members left at home by Confederate soldiers and officers. In the American tall tale tradition, Granny somehow always manages to accomplish her task until she gets murdered by Grumby the villain. Then Bayard and Ringo shoot him dead, cut his killing hand and tie it on Granny's gravestone. Poetic justice has been done: two boys have grown up together in insanely hard times.

Therefore, writing and reading about the "*Uncivil Wars*" is still worthwhile: it can take us all miles away from the nagging petty question: "*when will I be blown up*?" Since the "*Uncivil Wars*" can only be about "*the human heart in conflict with itself*" – "*Uncivility"* can only stand here for the survival of the spirit defying death of any kind – whether it would-be military glory or just because of some (natural?) circumstances.

This may remind us of a funny poem written in full swing of that same *(Un)civil War*:

> Because I could not stop for Death –
> He kindly stopped for me –
> The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
> And Immortality.
> We slowly drove – He knew no haste
> And I had put away
> My labor and my leisure too,
> For His Civility[7] - (Emily Dickinson, 219)

Whether as a soldier or as a civil(ian) escort on a trip, Mr. Death is but a flirt. *What Will Endure* is within the poet's mind, within the reader's soul; or rather within "*the human heart in conflict with itself*." Q. e. d.

[7] Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), poem 479/712, "Because I could not stop for Death." According to R. W. Franklin, the poem must have been written in 1862.

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The narrative spider-web of the book plus the chronology, plus the genealogy, plus the map got woven in the same American tall tale tradition, to prove both its force and its vulnerability. The same American Civil War provides the necessary setting for the climax in the crises between Thomas Sutpen and his sons. Fighting together for the same Lost Cause, the failed father and Henry Sutpen, and Charles Bon are brought together for the inevitable confrontation.

The crises of the failed father and his sons stay under the same sign of doom: they are resumed whenever the story is retold; they are irreconcilable:

> "Yes," Quentin said. The two children" thinking *Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space to the old ineradicable rhythm* thinking *Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.* (*Absalom, Absalom!* 273)

It is highly significant that William Faulkner chooses this particular instance of Quentin Compson's interior monologue, projected upon the screen of Thomas Sutpen and his sons' formidable story, to affirm again his own authorial vision on his highly poetic narrative art: "maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished." In the Old South spirit of "oratory of solitude" – there is no zero level. No beginning can ever be innocent. The paternal principle itself is an illusion. And as for authority – this is just a matter of point of view. Round the ripple circle, protagonists may play narrators who may play authors who may play.

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No son of Thomas Sutpen can measure up to his daughter Judith when it comes to endurance. Judith Sutpen sums up all the qualities her father had dreamt of for his perfect son: boldness, bravery, determination, endurance. Plus the obstinacy running in the family! Yet, she is just the daughter Thomas Sutpen begot in his lawful marriage to Ellen Coldfield. Other daughters of his were Clytemnestra (Clytie) Sutpen, whose mother was a slave; and last but not least, the nameless baby of Milly Jones, who was Wash Jones's granddaughter. Somehow, it is this nameless baby daughter who has Thomas Sutpen killed: Wash Jones, his faithful orderly in

the Civil War, feels betrayed by his master, who despises the infant girl and her mother. So this inadequate birth means the end of the failed father's life. The Oedipal complex works and is fulfilled by an unnamed baby daughter.

The entire baroque plot of the book is built up on tragic-comic irony. In this narrative labyrinth, (out)rage is the key-mode. And for all the displayed masculine hybris, it is a woman's presence (or even absence) that accomplishes the fatal act. Clytemnestra, the name of Judith's African American sister name, plus its preposterous diminutive – Clytie – will just function as echoes (analepses) and preludes (prolepses) to this doom pattern.

Judith is ineluctably present and absent in Charles Bon's short life. Repudiated by his (and her) failed father for his mother's black blood quotient, Charles Bon makes a final attempt to have Sutpen Sr. acknowledge him as a first born son. The American Civil War is nothing more than a setting here: it provides the opportunity for this fateful confrontation. Not only does the failed father ignore his chance of reconcilement with the denied first son: he makes Henry – his official white son – promise him that Charles shall never marry Judith. And his verdict is not even dictated by the scruple of incest (this would have meant the failed father's acknowledgement of the rejected son): it is dictated by the father's obsessive fear of miscegenation. Therefore, Henry Sutpen will kill Charles Bon, his half brother, on his father's *dark house* threshold. It is a Bakhtinian place: the threshold that must mark this polyphonic narrative plot. No prodigal son(s) welcome.

Judith Sutpen and Charles Bon must live their (twice) forbidden romance despite their failed father, despite their blood that both unites them and separates them; despite all conventions; despite the Civil War, which is no more than the busy screen against which their love story unfolds.

The letter written by Charles Bon to Judith Sutpen adds up to the metafictional standard of the book. As a piece of (lyrical) writing about (literary) writing, Charles's letter to Judith can only tell her (and other unsuspected readers) that "words are no good:" the author's own acknowledgement of failure. William Faulkner had previously put this sentence in the soliloquy of Addie Bundren[8], another one of his strong feminine protagonists in Yoknapatawpha.

The only letter from Charles that Judith will keep is entrusted by her to Quentin Compson's grandmother, after Charles's death. This is one of the oldest fiction narrative tricks to win over the readers' confidence. The "genuine" (mock) historical document! Yet, here it is: "without date or salutation or signature."

[8] William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 1930. Addie Bundren resolves to die after having done her duty for a lifetime – like a good soldier. Though the Bundrens are poor white trash and Addie is just a country schoolteacher, she obviously shares her sense of commitment to her family and her independent passionate personality, with the aristocratic Judith Sutpen. For such strong feminine protagonists, William Faulkner seems to owe a lot to one of his classic American precursors, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Charles's only surviving letter to Judith, his widowed half-sister, is a masterpiece of literary seduction. Moreover, since it is (allegedly) written by a Southern *belle*'s suitor and half-brother with some African American blood in his veins, it displays the classic projection of Africanism[9] more than half a century before Toni Morrison defined it.

From the rhetorical point of view, this epistolary interlude shows its author's (rather vain) virtuosity. The essential message still remains a mystery – although when such a message has to be conveyed there is no need of ink or of any other conventional substance that may leave a print on paper – or on any other writing support. Instead of ink, the letter writer boasts he was using fresh New England stove polish. (William Faulkner will replace ink again in *The Unvanquished*, when Miss Rosa Millard manages her fraudulent mule-trading and profit distribution book-keeping in hellebore.)

Instead of ordinary paper, the letter writer can ironically only afford a much more luxurious support (à la guerre comme à la guerre): "a sheet of notepaper with, as you can see, the best French watermarks dated seventy years ago" – i.e. about the time of the previous grand warfare on American soil, the Revolutionary War of Independence. In those days, note-paper might have come directly from a European country like Revolutionary France, still entertaining some secret hopes of political influence upon the new independent United States of America.

Twice in his letter, Charles Bon emphasizes: "You will notice how I will insult neither of us by claiming this to be a voice from the defeated even, let alone from the dead" (133) and then again: "You will notice how I do not insult you either by saying I have waited long enough. And therefore, since I do not insult you by saying that only I have waited, I do not add, expect me. Because I cannot say when to expect me" (134-135).

Between the two occurrences of the mesmerizing formula "you will notice how I will not insult you/ us, etc." – there comes the blow: "*We have waited long enough*" (134; my emphasis). So that the letter may now conclude meaningfully – yet cryptically, too: "I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live" (135-136).

The rest of this would-be enamored Old South soldier's letter from the American Civil War battlefield is a (bragging and self-ironic) digression – more or

[9] See Toni Morrison's concept of Africanism as postulated in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*: "Rather I use this term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. […] Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, *American Africanism makes it possible to say and not to say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom*." (6-7; my emphasis)

less. On the other hand, the main message is metafiction and metaphysics, and metaphor – all the more so since Charles Bon knows that he may probably die – not at all like a hero of the Lost Cause, but like the victim of a crime of passion of his own design.

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No more/less of an anti-hero is Rev. Gail Hightower in *Light in August*. Hightower was in empathy with his grandfather who had lost his life in the Civil War while trying to steal chickens. Ironically, the grandfather was evoked in glorious images by his grandson who would, thus, justify both his professional calling and his personal fate in Jefferson: "God must call me to Jefferson because my life died there, was shot from the saddle of a galloping horse in a Jefferson street one night twenty years before it was ever born" (*Light in August*, 478).

As a senior protagonist in William Faulkner's fiction, the ghost of Rev. Hightower's grandfather cannot remain at a safe distance from the Old Colonel William Clark Falkner, the writer's own paternal great-grandfather, whose statue still guards his memory as a Confederate officer in Ripley, Mississippi, and who died murdered in broad daylight by a political rival. Just like Gail Hightower in his youth, William Faulkner idealized his grandfather all along his boyhood and hoped to become one day as gifted a writer as the Old Colonel, the author of the successful romance *The White Rose of Memphis*.

Yet instead of ensuring the heroic aura, the Lost Cause makes everything debatable. Devotion – whether in warfare or religion – may help replace fact by fiction; so the un-heroic version of the faithful Confederate soldier dying in action has one basic motive, hunger:

> You see before the crash, in the abrupt red glare the horses with wide eyes and nostrils in tossing heads, sweatstained; the gleam of metal, the white gaunt faces of living scarecrows who have not eaten all they wanted at one time since they could remember; perhaps some of them had already dismounted, perhaps one or two had already entered the henhouse. All this you see before the crash of the shotgun comes: then blackness again. It was just one shot. 'And of course he would be right in de way of hit,' Cinthy said. 'Stealin' chickens. A man growed, wid a married son, gone to war whar his business was killin Yankees, killed in somebody else's henhouse wid a han'full of feathers.' Stealin' chickens. (484-485)

Hightower had kept this dreadful grotesque secret to himself though he had lost his parishioners and his place in the pulpit just because of his preaching about his invented Confederate heroes instead of saintly issues. His redemption would occur when he hosted and helped Lena Grove in childbirth. This moment is another triumph of fiction over matters of both history and religion. Actually, listening to Byron Bunch's arguments in favor of supporting the pregnant young woman, Hightower exclaims exasperated: "Ah Byron, Byron.

What a dramatist you would have made" (389) – which sounds like a witty aside granted to us readers by the author himself, under the narrator's mask.

Ironically, Hightower's house also provides the final setting stage for the savage racist execution of Joe Christmas. To the horror of an audience avid for such shows, his lynching and castration are directed and accomplished by Percy Grimm, an over-eager young policeman of Jefferson, a confirmed racist whose fanaticism verges insanity. Having been born too recently and thus, having missed his chance to becoming a hero in some military action, on the genuine battlefield, Percy Grimm surpasses himself in useless cruelty to his victim. Joe Christmas's ambiguous identity to the end of the book enhances the monstrosity of this super-efficient executioner, a model of devotion to his wasted military calling.

This is what has made literary critics see in Faulkner's odious Percy Grimm a gruesome warfare prophecy at that time (in 1932). Fictive rendering of early twentieth century American racism was just as convincing an anticipation of Nazism and the horrors of Holocaust and World War II already on its way.

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The American Civil War was not at all William Faulkner's only war in fiction. In *Soldier's Pay* (1926) and *A Fable* (1954) World War I had been Faulkner's inspiration. His celebrated *Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature uttered in Stockholm on December 10th 1950* remains representative for the mid-twentieth century mood of the Cold War. It will still move us readers of the twenty-first century first two decades who can decode it as a prophecy of our own sense of insecurity in a world at the mercy of terrorism.

The American Civil War was not Faulkner's only war, obviously. But it remains a truthful symbol of (any kind of) warfare trauma never completely overcome by interludes of peace. And moreover, Faulkner's allegorical Civil War renderings can still involve us all in a quest for our conscience – Faulkner's visionary project which he liked to call "the human heart in conflict with itself."

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